

PATENT SPECIFICATION (11)

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- (21) Application No. 38187/77 (22) Filed 13 Sept. 1977 (19)
 (31) Convention Application Nos. 722 870 (32) Filed 13 Sept. 1976
 817 184 20 July 1977 in
 (33) United States of America (US)
 (44) Complete Specification published 13 May 1981
 (51) INT. CL.³ A23B 4/00
 (52) Index at acceptance
 A2D 2A 2D1 2D2 2L 2X6 3B2A 3B2X 3B3X
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(54) PROCESS AND COMPOSITION FOR PRODUCING AND MAINTAINING
 GOOD COLOR IN FRESH MEAT, POULTRY AND FISH

(71) We, TRANSFRESH CORPORATION, a Corporation of the State of Delaware, United States of America, of 607 Brunken Avenue, Salinas, California, 93901, United States of America, do hereby declare the invention, for which we pray that a patent may be granted to us, and the method by which it is to be performed, to be particularly described in and by the following statement:—

This invention relates to a process and a composition for establishing and maintaining good color in fresh meat, fresh poultry and fresh fish.

The literature relating to the establishment and maintenance of good color in fresh meat, fresh poultry and fresh fish includes U.S. Patents 3,851,808 and 3,930,040, and A. El Badawi, R. Cain, S. Samuels, and A. Anglemeier, *Color and Pigment Stability of Packaged Refrigerated Beef*, Food Technology, pp. 159—163 (May, 1964) and T. Besser and A. Kramer, *Changes in Quality and Nutritional Composition of Foods Preserved by Gas Exchange*, 37 Journal of Food Science, pp. 820—823 (1972) and which describe the use of certain modified gaseous atmospheres for providing and maintaining good color in fresh meat, fresh poultry and fresh fish. None, however, discloses the modified atmospheres of this invention or the highly simplified process of this invention for doing these tasks.

In accordance with this invention, good color is established and maintained in fresh meat, fresh poultry and fresh fish. In fresh meat and poultry, the process comprises reducing oxy-myoglobin on and below the meat or poultry surface to reduced myoglobin, then subjecting the fresh meat and fresh poultry to a modified atmosphere including carbon monoxide to convert reduced myoglobin to carboxymyoglobin to a depth of not more than $\frac{3}{8}$ inch, preferably not more than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch, below the surface of the fresh meat or fresh poultry. Until the

conversion of the reduced myoglobin to carboxymyoglobin is complete, the modified atmosphere preferably includes as little oxygen as possible, and as little as possible of any other substance that would inhibit conversion to carboxymyoglobin. Preferably, the modified atmosphere will include at least 10% by volume carbon dioxide and the balance substantially all molecular nitrogen and/or other inert gases. Some oxygen may be present during this conversion, but preferably in amounts not greater than 10% by volume, and more preferably, in amounts not greater than 5% by volume. Increasing the concentration of oxygen before the conversion is complete simply tends to inhibit the conversion to carboxymyoglobin as the oxygen competes for the reactive sites in the reduced myoglobin. A substantial portion is converted from reduced myoglobin to carboxymyoglobin when the naked eye can see a distinct overall color change from the purple color of reduced myoglobin to the bright red color of carboxymyoglobin.

The amount of carbon monoxide sufficient to effect such conversion to a depth not greater than $\frac{3}{8}$ inch, and preferably not greater than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch, varies depending upon the method employed to convert oxy-myoglobin to reduced myoglobin. This method may be the use of a reducing agent, application of a vacuum, flushing with an inert gas such as nitrogen, or some other method. Thus, where a reducing agent such as ascorbic acid is used to form the atmosphere low in oxygen concentration, the carbon monoxide concentration may range from 0.10% to 3%, for example 0.25% to 3%. By contrast, where nitrogen flushing is used for this purpose, the carbon monoxide concentration may range from 0.10% to 1.5%, more preferably about 1%.

Similarly, the invention provides a process for treating fresh fish, which process comprises reducing oxy-myoglobin/oxyhemoglobin on and below the surface of the fresh

fish to reduced myoglobin/hemoglobin, then
 5 subjecting the fresh fish to a modified atmo-
 sphere including carbon monoxide to con-
 vert the reduced myoglobin/hemoglobin to
 10 carboxymyoglobin/carboxyhemoglobin on
 and below the surface of the fresh fish.
 Until the conversion of the reduced myo-
 globin/hemoglobin to carboxymyoglobin/
 15 carboxyhemoglobin is complete, the modi-
 fied atmosphere preferably includes as little
 oxygen as possible, and as little as possible
 20 of any other substance that would inhibit
 conversion to carboxymyoglobin/ carboxy-
 hemoglobin. Preferably, the modified atmo-
 sphere will include at least 10% by volume
 25 carbon dioxide and the balance substantially
 all molecular nitrogen and/or other inert
 gases. Some oxygen may be present during
 this conversion, but preferably in amounts
 30 not greater than 10% by volume, and more
 preferably, in amounts not greater than 5%
 by volume. Increasing the concentration of
 oxygen before the conversion is complete
 35 simply tends to inhibit the conversion to
 carboxymyoglobin/carboxyhemoglobin as
 the oxygen competes for the reactive sites
 in the reduced myoglobin/hemoglobin. A
 40 substantial portion is converted from re-
 duced myoglobin/hemoglobin to carboxy-
 myoglobin/carboxyhemoglobin when the
 naked eye can see a distinct overall color
 45 change from the purple color of reduced
 myoglobin/hemoglobin to the bright red
 color of carboxymyoglobin/carboxyhe-
 moglobin. For fresh fish, sufficient carbon
 50 monoxide is generally in the range of 0.25%
 to 1.5%, more preferably from 0.25% to
 1%, but these amounts may vary with the
 nature of the fish treated, the conditions to
 which the fish was exposed before being
 55 subjected to the process of this invention,
 and the method used to reduce oxymyo-
 globin/oxymyoglobin to reduced myo-
 globin/hemoglobin.

The new process is particularly important
 and effective where the fresh meat, fresh
 poultry and fresh fish is maintained under
 60 refrigerated conditions, typically a tempera-
 ture in the range of 29°F. to 40°F. In
 commercial practice, the ambient tempera-
 ture may be somewhat lower (e.g. 26°—
 27°F.) without completely freezing the fresh
 meat, fresh poultry and fresh fish.

Subjecting fresh meat, fresh poultry and
 65 fresh fish to an atmosphere low in oxygen
 concentration converts the oxymyoglobin,
 which is red in color, on the fresh meat and
 fresh poultry, and the oxymyoglobin/oxymyoglobin on the surface of fresh fish,
 which are also red in color, to the purple-
 colored reduced myoglobin and reduced
 myoglobin/hemoglobin, respectively. Sub-
 70 jecting the fresh meat, fresh poultry and
 fresh fish thereafter to the carbon monoxide-
 containing modified atmosphere converts the

reduced myoglobin and reduced myoglobin/
 hemoglobin to carboxymyoglobin and
 carboxymyoglobin/carboxyhemoglobin, re-
 spectively, both of which are attractively red
 75 in color, and are stable under refrigerated
 conditions for long periods of time, such
 as two to four weeks.

During or following treatment in accord-
 80 ance with the new process, the fresh meat,
 fresh poultry and fresh fish may be main-
 tained in a modified atmosphere including,
 by volume, 10% to 85% carbon dioxide,
 which inhibits growth of slime- and odor-
 producing organisms, and the balance sub-
 85 stantially all nitrogen (molecular N₂) and
 oxygen (molecular O₂). The oxygen is pre-
 ferably present in an amount as low as
 possible and preferably in the range of 0%
 to 30%, for example 2% to 30%. This
 90 modified atmosphere may be applied, in
 whole or in part, during the conversion of
 reduced myoglobin, in fish, to carboxy-
 myoglobin and carboxymyoglobin/hemo-
 globin, respectively. Thus in addition to
 carbon monoxide, that modified atmosphere
 may include at least 10% carbon dioxide.
 However, the oxygen concentration should
 be as low as possible until conversion to the
 reduced myoglobin or reduced myoglobin/
 95 hemoglobin is complete. Again, the fresh
 meat, fresh poultry and fresh fish should
 be refrigerated, typically meaning main-
 tenance in a temperature range of 29°F to
 40°F., preferably 29°F. to 33°F. Meat,
 poultry and fish maintained under these
 100 conditions will retain the good color pro-
 duced by the new process for three to four
 weeks or even longer.

Alternatively, following treatment in ac-
 105 cordance with the new process, the fresh
 meat, fresh poultry or fresh fish may be
 frozen and maintained in that state until
 ready for sale, consumption or other use.
 If frozen, the meat, poultry and fish will
 retain the red color of carboxymyoglobin
 110 and carboxyhemoglobin, and the carbon
 dioxide containing modified atmosphere
 need not be applied until the meat, poultry
 or fish is thawed. Meat, fish and poultry
 freeze at temperatures below about 29°F.
 115 at a pressure approximating atmospheric.

The process of this invention works on
 all kinds of fresh meat and fresh poultry,
 including beef, pork, veal, lamb, mutton,
 120 chicken, turkey and game such as venison,
 pheasant, quail and duck. The meat may be
 processed or may be in the form of carcasses,
 primals (e.g. quarters) subprimals (e.g., top
 round), or retail cuts, and may be partially
 125 or wholly comminuted or mixed. The pro-
 cess is also effective on whole fish, fillets, and
 other forms that fish take, and on wide
 varieties of fish including salmon, sole, bass,
 trout, cod, and whitefish.

Producing an atmosphere of low oxygen 130

concentration may be effected in any one of several ways, including placing the fresh meat, fresh poultry and fresh fish under an inert gaseous atmosphere containing a low concentration of oxygen. For example, an atmosphere high in nitrogen concentration, such as an atmosphere containing 90% to 100% nitrogen by volume, for a period of time from 15 minutes to 2—3 hours, has proved effective for this purpose. Alternatively, the meat, poultry or fish may be subjected to vacuum treatment or may be treated with reducing agents such as ascorbic acid under conditions and for a time sufficient to convert oxymyoglobin and oxyhemoglobin to reduced myoglobin and reduced hemoglobin, respectively. In general, a low oxygen concentration means a concentration of less than 10% by volume, more preferably, less than 5% by volume, and as close to zero percent as practicable.

The modified atmosphere used in effecting conversion to carboxymyoglobin in meat and poultry and to carboxymyoglobin/carboxyhemoglobin in fish includes, by volume, sufficient carbon monoxide, broadly 0.10% to 3% for fresh meat and poultry, more preferably about 1% where the fresh meat is beef, to assure that the conversion of reduced myoglobin to carboxymyoglobin does not penetrate below the surface of the fresh meat to a depth of more than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch, preferably not more than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. Preferably, 0.25% to 1.5% carbon monoxide is used for fresh fish to assure that the conversion of a substantial portion of the reduced myoglobin/hemoglobin to carboxymyoglobin/carboxyhemoglobin at the surface of the fresh fish is effected. Optimum amounts of carbon monoxide for different varieties of meat, poultry and fish vary depending upon the nature of the meat, poultry or fish, the method used to oxygenate oxymyoglobin and oxyhemoglobin, and the conditions under which the meat or fish was maintained before being subjected to this new process.

The following examples illustrate that the new process establishes and maintains good color in many varieties of fresh meat, poultry and fish and maintains that good color over extended storage conditions if the fresh meat, poultry and fish are maintained under the modified atmosphere of this invention, or if the fresh meat, poultry and fish are frozen. In the examples, all gas percentages are by volume unless otherwise stated.

EXAMPLE I

One round beefsteak weighing about 0.5 pound was placed in a 10-liter desiccator and nitrogen was fed to the desiccator until the nitrogen concentration reached about 98%, and the oxygen level in the desiccator

dropped to about 2%. The desiccator was left in this condition for about one hour until the color on the surface of the beef changed from the red or oxymyoglobin to the purple of reduced myoglobin. Carbon monoxide was fed to the desiccator until the concentration reached about 0.5% by volume, was left on the meat for two days. After two days, the beef had absorbed nearly all of the carbon monoxide, the beefsteak surface had assumed the red color or carboxymyoglobin, and that color penetrated to a depth of $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch below the surface of the meat.

The desiccator was then filled with a modified atmosphere including about 55% carbon dioxide, about 16% oxygen, and the balance substantially all nitrogen. Six days later, the beefsteak retained its good red color, and the carboxymyoglobin color had penetrated no more deeply than it had at the end of two days.

A second round beef-steak weighing about 0.5 pound was dipped in a 1% ascorbic acid solution, and maintained in the acid for about ten minutes after which the meat color had changed from red (oxymyoglobin) to purple (reduced myoglobin). This steak was then placed in a 10-liter desiccator, and the desiccator was filled with an atmosphere comprising 1.0% oxygen, about 2.5% carbon monoxide and the balance substantially all nitrogen. After two days of storage, the steak had changed from purple to red (carboxymyoglobin), and the carboxymyoglobin had penetrated to a depth of about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch below the surface of the meat.

Thereafter, an atmosphere consisting essentially of about 55% carbon dioxide, about 15% oxygen, and the balance substantially all nitrogen was fed to the desiccator, and the desiccator was so maintained for six days. After this period, the meat retained its good color, and the carboxymyoglobin had penetrated no more deeply into the meat than it had at the end of the two-day period.

EXAMPLE II

Each of five pieces of beef roundsteak weighing about 0.5 pound was placed in a separate 10-liter desiccator, and the desiccator was flushed with nitrogen to raise the nitrogen concentration to nearly 100%, and to reduce the oxygen level in the desiccator to near 0%. Each piece of beefsteak was maintained for one hour under this reduced oxygen atmosphere, after which each steak surface had changed from red to purple in color, indicating that the oxymyoglobin on the beef surface had changed to reduced myoglobin.

Each desiccator was then filled with carbon dioxide to a volume of about 70% and carbon monoxide was added in amounts of 100, 200, 300, 400 and 500 cc to the

five desiccators, respectively, to give a residual range of 0.5% to 3% carbon monoxide in the five different desiccators. (Although the amounts of carbon monoxide added appear to constitute about 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5% carbon monoxide, some carbon monoxide is apparently rapidly absorbed by the meat, reducing the measurable carbon monoxide content to the levels indicated).

After storage under these conditions for seventeen days at 34°F., all beef attained and maintained the attractive red color of carboxymyoglobin, and none of the treated beef had spoiled. By contrast, steak held in air at 34°F. for the same period plainly had spoiled and had assumed the unattractive brown color of metmyoglobin. However, the formation of carboxymyoglobin had penetrated to depths greater than about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in all desiccators other than that to which 100 cc of carbon monoxide was added. These results indicate that the preferred concentration of carbon monoxide for attaining and maintaining good red beef color is preferably not more than about 1% and that carbon dioxide inhibits slime- and odor-producing organisms.

EXAMPLE III

Each of eight 100-gram chunks of beef was placed into a separate 10-liter desiccator and partial vacuum was pulled on each desiccator with an aspirator. Fifty and 100 cc of carbon monoxide were added to each of two desiccators immediately after vacuum was pulled. The same quantities were added to two other desiccators 15 minutes after vacuum was pulled, to two others 30 minutes after vacuum was pulled, and to the final two desiccators 60 minutes after vacuum was pulled.

Twenty-four hours later, high carbon dioxide concentrations, ranging from 70% to 85% by volume, were added to all the desiccators. The oxygen content of each desiccator rose to about 6—7% as the vacuum in each desiccator dissipated. The beef was held fifteen days at a temperature of 33°—34°F. under these conditions. Application of the vacuum to each desiccator turned the meat color from the bright red of oxymyoglobin to the reddish purple of reduced myoglobin, indicating that the oxygen had been removed from the oxymyoglobin at the beef's surface by the vacuum treatment.

All of the meat samples receiving a 50 cc treatment of carbon monoxide (0.5% carbon monoxide by volume) attained only fair color after 15 days of storage. The meat receiving 100 cc of carbon monoxide (1% carbon monoxide by volume) attained and retained good red carboxymyoglobin color at the end of the 15-day storage period. The time of application of carbon

monoxide after vacuum treatment with no observable effect. This demonstrates that where vacuum is used to convert oxymyoglobin to reduced myoglobin before treatment with carbon monoxide, low concentrations of carbon monoxide may be used to produce carboxymyoglobin on and below the meat surface.

EXAMPLE IV

Each 12 of chunks of beef weighing about 100 grams was placed in a separate 10-liter desiccator. Each desiccator was flushed with nitrogen for five minutes to raise the nitrogen level to near 100% and to reduce the oxygen level to near zero. Thereafter, carbon dioxide was fed to each desiccator until the content reached about 65° by volume. Then, 10 cc, 25 cc, 50 cc and 100 cc, respectively, of carbon monoxide were added to four different desiccators, to produce carbon monoxide concentrations of 0.1%, 0.25%, 0.5% and 1%, respectively. Fifteen minutes later, four other desiccators were similarly treated and 60 minutes later, the last four desiccators received the same treatment.

All samples were thereafter held two weeks at 33—34°F. After two weeks, all beef treated with 1% carbon monoxide had excellent color, regardless of the time period elapsed after flushing with nitrogen. Beef treated with 0.5% carbon monoxide one hour after flushing had comparable color after two weeks, but beef treated 15 minutes after flushing had only fair color, and beef treated immediately after flushing had poor color. Of the beef receiving 0.25% carbon monoxide treatments, beef treated one hour after flushing had fair color; beef treated 15 minutes and beef treated immediately after flushing had poor color. All beef samples receiving 0.1% treatment had poor color, regardless of the time elapsed after nitrogen flushing. In no case did the penetration of carboxymyoglobin into the meat exceed about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch.

None of the beef was biologically spoiled, but air control samples maintained at the same temperature over the same storage period were all badly spoiled.

This example demonstrates that a 1% carbon monoxide concentration is effective to establish and maintain good red beef color for extended storage periods regardless of the time lapse between conversion of oxymyoglobin to reduced myoglobin through inert gas flushing and the subsequent conversion of reduced myoglobin to carboxymyoglobin. Carbon monoxide concentrations lower than 1% may be effective where sufficient time is allowed after inert gas flushing to effect conversion of oxymyoglobin to reduced myoglobin on the beef surface.

EXAMPLE V

Each of six beef ribsteaks was placed in a separate 10-liter desiccator, and each desiccator was then flushed with nitrogen to reduce the oxygen content to about zero per cent. The steaks were left in this atmosphere for about one hour, after which the meat had turned from red to purple in color, indicating that oxymyoglobin on the beef surface had changed to reduced myoglobin. Carbon dioxide was then fed to each desiccator until the concentration in each had reached about 60% by volume. Then carbon monoxide was added at concentrations of 100 (1%), 75 (0.75%), 50 (0.5%), 25 (0.25%), 15 (0.15%) and 10 (0.1%) cc to the six different desiccators, and each was held in this condition at 34°F. for a period of nine days.

At the end of this period, all beefsteaks maintained under the atmosphere containing 1%, 0.75%, 0.5% and 0.25% carbon monoxide maintained the good red color of carboxymyoglobin. Beef held under the other atmospheres had good color, but was significantly less attractive. None of the treatments produced a penetration below the surface of the beef of greater than about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch, and none of the meat was spoiled at the end of the storage period. These results indicate that the concentration of carbon monoxide may be as low as about 0.25% by volume where the conversion of oxymyoglobin to reduced myoglobin is complete before conversion to carboxymyoglobin is effected.

EXAMPLE VI

Separate, 100 gram chunks of beef, pork and lamb were placed into 12 different 10-liter desiccators. Nitrogen was fed to each desiccator until the nitrogen concentration in each rose to nearly 100%. Carbon dioxide was then fed to each desiccator until the concentration of carbon dioxide in each desiccator reached about 80%. Immediately thereafter, carbon monoxide was fed to three of the desiccators until the concentration therein reached about 1%, about 0.5% and about 0.25% respectively. Fifteen minutes later, the same concentrations of carbon monoxide were fed to three other desiccators. Thirty minutes later, the same three concentrations were fed to three more desiccators. Finally, one hour after the carbon dioxide content of each desiccator was raised to 80%, the carbon monoxide was fed to the last three desiccators, raising their carbon monoxide content to about 1%, about 0.5%, and about 0.25%, respectively. All desiccators were held under these conditions for 15 days at a temperature of about 33°–34°F.

Observation of the meat immediately after nitrogen flushing revealed that the red oxy-

myoglobin on the surface of the meat had been changed to the purple color of reduced myoglobin. In all cases where the carbon monoxide content was raised to about 1%, all of the meat changed from the purple myoglobin color to the red color of carboxymyoglobin within two days. However, in this test, where the concentration of carbon monoxide was 0.5% or 0.25%, good red carboxymyoglobin did not form on the surface of the beef, but did form on the surface of the lamb or pork. In all cases, none of the meat spoiled during the 15-day storage period, and none exhibited a carboxymyoglobin penetration below the surface of the meat greater than about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch.

These results show that lower concentrations of carbon monoxide may be used to convert reduced myoglobin on the surface of pork and lamb than to effect the same conversion on the surface of an equal amount of beef.

EXAMPLE VII

Into each of three 10-liter desiccators were placed one pound samples of fresh, ground chuck beef hamburger. Each test sample of hamburger was bright red in color. Using a nitrogen flush, the oxygen content of each desiccator was reduced to about 2–3%. A similar procedure was applied to two one-pound samples of fillet of sole in two other desiccators.

One hour after the oxygen content of the five desiccators was reduced to about 2–3%, the color of the hamburger had changed from bright red to reddish-purple. The color of the fish had not noticeably changed.

After observing the color change in the hamburger, 100 cubic centimeters (1% by volume) of carbon monoxide was added to each of the five desiccators (3 containing hamburger samples, 2 containing fillet of sole samples). All the desiccators, and five control samples (3 hamburger samples, 1 pound each, and 2 fillet of sole samples, 1 pound each, neither subjected to nitrogen flush or carbon monoxide) were placed in a room at 35°F. and held for 16 to 18 hours. Thereafter, the samples were removed from the desiccators, and, together with control samples, were placed in a freezer at a temperature of 0° to 5°F. for ten days.

After the ten day storage period in the freezer, all samples were moved and allowed to thaw at ambient temperature for 6 hours. The carbon monoxide-treated hamburger had an attractive red color comparable to fresh hamburger. The treated fillet of sole had a pink color closely approximating the color of fresh fish. The two untreated control fillet of sole samples had a tannish-white appearance, and were considerably less attractive than the treated fish. The

three untreated hamburger control samples were mostly brown in color and quite unattractive.

WHAT WE CLAIM IS:—

1. A process for treating fresh meat and/or poultry, which process comprises reducing oxymyoglobin on and below the surface of said fresh meat and/or poultry, to reduced myoglobin, then subjecting said fresh meat and/or poultry to a modified atmosphere including carbon monoxide to convert reduced myoglobin to carboxymyoglobin to a depth of not more than $\frac{3}{4}$ inch below the surface of said fresh meat and/or poultry.
2. The process of claim 1 wherein the concentration of carbon monoxide, by volume, is in the range of 0.10% to 3%.
3. The process of claim 1 or 2 wherein said modified atmosphere includes not more than 10% oxygen by volume.
4. The process of any of claims 1, 2 or 3 wherein the modified atmosphere contains at least 10% carbon dioxide by volume and the balance is substantially all nitrogen.
5. The process of any of claims 1, 2 or 3 wherein following the treatment of said fresh meat and/or poultry in said modified atmosphere, said fresh meat and/or poultry is subjected to a further atmosphere including 10% to 85% carbon dioxide, and the balance substantially all nitrogen and oxygen.
6. The process of claim 5 wherein said further atmosphere contains zero to 30% oxygen by volume.
7. The process of claims 5 or 6 wherein said fresh meat is beef and said modified atmosphere includes about 1% carbon monoxide by volume.
8. The process of any of the preceding claims wherein the temperature of the modified atmosphere is maintained at 27°F to 40°F.
9. The process of any of the preceding claims wherein said fresh meat and/or poultry are frozen after myoglobin is converted to carboxymyoglobin.
10. The process of any of claims 1 to 9 wherein reduction is achieved by subjecting said fresh meat and/or poultry to an inert atmosphere.
11. The process of any of claims 1 to 9 wherein reduction is achieved by subjecting said fresh meat and/or poultry to a vacuum.
12. The process of any of claims 1 to 9 wherein reduction is achieved by subjecting said fresh meat and/or poultry to a reducing agent.
13. The process of claim 1 wherein the concentration of carbon monoxide, by volume, is in the range of 0.25% to 3%.
14. The process of claim 13 wherein said modified atmosphere includes 0% to 5% oxygen by volume.
15. The process of claim 13 or 14 wherein, following the treatment of said fresh meat and/or poultry in said modified atmosphere, said fresh meat and/or poultry is subjected to a further atmosphere including 10% to 85% carbon dioxide, and the balance substantially all nitrogen and oxygen.
16. The process of claim 15 wherein said further atmosphere contains 2% to 30% oxygen by volume.
17. The process of claim 15 or 16 wherein said meat is beef and said modified atmosphere includes about 1% carbon monoxide by volume.
18. The process of any of claims 13 to 17 wherein the temperature of the modified atmosphere is maintained at 27°F to 40°F.
19. The process of any of claims 13 to 18 wherein reduction is achieved by subjecting fresh meat and or poultry to an inert atmosphere.
20. The process of any of claims 13 to 18 wherein reduction is achieved by subjecting said fresh meat and/or poultry to a vacuum.
21. The process of any of claims 13 to 18 wherein reduction is achieved by subjecting said fresh meat and/or poultry to a reducing agent.
22. A process for treating fresh fish, which process comprises reducing oxymyoglobin/oxyhemoglobin on and below the surface of said fresh fish to reduced myoglobin/hemoglobin, and then subjecting said fresh fish to a modified atmosphere including carbon monoxide to convert reduced myoglobin/hemoglobin to carboxymyoglobin carboxyhemoglobin on and below the surface of said fresh fish.
23. The process of claim 22 wherein the concentration of carbon monoxide, by volume, is in the range of 0.25% to 1.5%.
24. The process of claim 22 or 23 wherein the modified atmosphere includes not more than 10% oxygen by volume.
25. The process of any of claims 22, 23 or 24 wherein the modified atmosphere includes at least 10% carbon dioxide by volume and the balance is substantially all nitrogen.
26. The process of any of claims 22 to 25 wherein said fresh fish is frozen after the conversion of reduced myoglobin/hemoglobin to carboxymyoglobin/carboxyhemoglobin on and below the surface of said fresh fish.
27. The process of any of claims 22, 23 or 24 wherein, following the treatment of said fresh fish in said modified atmosphere, said fresh fish is subjected to a further atmosphere including 10% to 85% carbon dioxide and the balance substantially all nitrogen and oxygen.
28. The process of claim 27 wherein

said further atmosphere includes zero to 30% oxygen by volume.

29. The process of any of claims 22 to 28 wherein said fresh fish is maintained at a temperature in the range 27°F to 40°F during subjection of said fresh fish to the modified atmosphere.

30. The process of claim 22 or 23 wherein the modified atmosphere includes 0% to 5% oxygen by volume.

31. The process of claim 30 wherein, following the treatment of said fresh fish in said modified atmosphere, said fresh fish is subjected to a further atmosphere including 10% to 85% carbon dioxide and the balance substantially all nitrogen and oxygen.

32. The process of claim 31 wherein said further atmosphere 2% to 30% oxygen by volume.

33. The process of any of claims 30, 31 or 32 wherein said fresh fish is maintained at a temperature in the range 27°F to 40°F during subjection of said fresh fish to the modified atmosphere.

34. A process for maintaining the colour of meat, poultry or fish substantially as described in any of Examples I to VI herein.

35. A process for maintaining the colour of meat or fish substantially as described in Example VII herein.

36. Meat, poultry or fish treated by a process according to any of the preceding claims.

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Printed for Her Majesty's Stationery Office by Burgess & Son (Abingdon), Ltd.—1981.
Published at The Patent Office, 25 Southampton Buildings, London, WC2A 1AY,
from which copies may be obtained.